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SIPDIS

DEPT FOR IO, NEA AND PRM; GENEVA FOR RMA

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TAGS: [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [KPAL](#) [KWBG](#) [JO](#) [UNRWA](#)

SUBJECT: CONSENSUS REACHED ON UNRWA GENEVA CONFERENCE;
ISRAELI PARTICIPATION MAY BE RESOLVED

REF: JERUSALEM 4009

Classified By: DCM David Hale, per 1.5 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary and comment: UNRWA officials briefed donor and host government representatives on preparations for the June 2004 UNRWA Geneva conference during a December 11 steering committee meeting in Amman. Apparent EC agreement to drop its previous insistence on a separate workshop on humanitarian access as well as careful UNRWA management of the NGO and panel debate issues seem to indicate that the conference is taking shape in way that reflects our concerns that it remain focused on UNRWA's humanitarian mandate. Apparent Israeli acquiescence in allowing the conference to proceed without their presence (at least, according to UNRWA) preserves this delicate balance. UNRWA requests written comment (if needed) on any outstanding conference issues before December 31. End summary and comment.

Israeli Participation May Be Resolved
After UNRWA-Israeli Discussions

12. (C) Following contentious debate at the December 2 core group meeting over UNRWA's surprise proposal to invite Israel to the Geneva Conference (ref), UNRWA agreed that it should not raise the subject with the broader steering committee until it had discussed the conference with Israeli officials. While the issue was therefore not raised in the steering committee, Syrian and PLO representatives separately told refcoord on the margins of the meeting that they could not accept Israeli participation at the Geneva conference. In a December 15 telcon, Deputy ComGen Karen AbuZayd told refcoord that she briefed senior Israeli MFA officials on the conference on December 14. She reported that the MFA seemed interested in and supportive of the conference, and did not express interest in participating in the conference. When questioned by refcoord, AbuZayd admitted that she had not invited the Israelis to participate in the meeting. UNRWA, she said, prefers to work under the assumption that the Israelis do not want to attend the conference and will only address the issue if the Israelis ask to attend. (AbuZayd confided to refcoord on the margins of the December 11 meeting that UNRWA hoped the Israelis would not be interested in participating in the Conference, as Israeli participation would be sure to politicize the Conference's debate.) The issue, AbuZayd concluded on December 15, would be closed unless the Israelis ask specifically to be invited to the Geneva conference.

Workshop Themes Finalized;
EC Drops Insistence on Access Workshop

13. (U) UNRWA External Relations Director Andrew Whitley told the steering committee December 11 that the core group had agreed on four workshop themes for the Conference: children and youth; housing, infrastructure and environment needs in the camps; empowering Palestinian refugees to participate in economic development; and conditions for the successful mobilization of resources. (Revised conference agenda was faxed to PRM/ANE.) The fifth proposed workshop, humanitarian access and obstacles to service delivery, would instead be addressed by interweaving these questions in a systematic fashion in the four remaining workshops.

14. (SBU) Both the EC and U.S. objected that the core group had not agreed to these four themes. As recorded in the minutes of the December 2 meeting, UNRWA core group members insisted that management concerns, including program budgeting and priorities, be included in the resource mobilization workshop. All core group members had agreed that the workshop title should be appropriately retitled. AbuZayd responded that the workshop would be retitled as requested. Finally, while the EC told the steering committee that it did not yet have instructions on the workshop topics, EC representative Philippe Jacques privately told refcoord that the compromise of addressing access in the four other workshops appeared to address the "spirit" of the EC's position as expressed by RELEX Director Leffler to PDAS Greene.

Sweden and Jordan Agree to Lead Workshops

15. (SBU) Only two countries have agreed to lead workshops at the Geneva conference. UNRWA confirmed that Sweden, as previously announced, would lead the workshop on children and youth while Jordan has agreed to lead the workshop on camp infrastructure. UNRWA announced at the steering committee meeting that it was in discussions with Canada over the economic development workshop and with Norway over the resources management workshop. CIDA representative Wayne Primeau later told refcoord that Canada still had many reservations about the conference and had opened discussions with UNRWA only over the provision of technical support (e.g., funding the participation of Palestinian refugee expert Rex Brynen) for a workshop. However, given Canada's role as gavel holder of the (defunct) Refugee Working Group, it was likely that Ottawa would eventually accept a more high-profile role. The EC, according to Jacques, has not yet decided what leadership role it will play in the conference and was unaware that UNRWA was touting it as a prospective vice-chair to other core group members.

Panel Debate

16. (U) UNRWA still hopes to include in the conference a panel debate among senior officials from host governments, major donors, UN agencies and research institutions. Building on suggestions made at the December 2 core group meeting, UNRWA proposed that the panel debate focus on: "Human Security and Economic Progress: Improving the Lives of Palestinian Refugees." External Relations Director Whitley told refcoord UNRWA hoped this subject would prove broad enough to capture the protection concerns favored by the Europeans, while steering the discourse closer to the socio-economic concerns preferred by the U.S. and host governments.

Conference Declaration

17. (U) UNRWA still hopes to issue a short declaration at the end of the conference, expressing support for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA and its mandate and the peace process. UNRWA plans to take the lead in the drafting process, circulating a proposed text to core group members in early January. Acknowledging that the drafting process could prove contentious, Whitley told the steering committee that UNRWA would be prepared not to issue a declaration if stakeholders were unable to reach consensus before the conference. UNRWA does not want the conference to devolve into negotiations over a politicized text.

NGO Consortia Participation

18. (U) UNRWA announced that the three Geneva-based NGO consortia (Interaction, SCHR and ICVA) would be invited to participate in the Conference. Deputy ComGen AbuZayd clarified that representatives from the three consortia will be free to participate in all aspects of the conference but that only Swiss Government and UNRWA officials would have speaking roles during the plenary session. The Netherlands pushed for participation of individual NGOs in the workshops, if those NGOs have particular expertise in the workshop topic. AbuZayd responded that such NGO participation could be appropriate but would be at the discretion of individual chairs to decide.

Next Steps

19. (U) UNRWA asked steering committee members to provide written comment (if needed) on any problematic conference issues before December 31. The next core group meeting will be held during the week of January 12, with a steering committee meeting scheduled in February. Both the core group and the steering committee will be eligible to comment on the draft declaration. Working groups for the four workshops are due to commence in January and will hold monthly meetings until late April, when they will produce policy papers for discussion at the Geneva Conference. Given apparent consensus on the overall direction for the conference and the timeline for planning the conference, UNRWA announced that it would issue "pre-invitations" to 65 donors, prospective donors and host governments before December 31.

Comment

10. (C) The Geneva Conference is finally taking shape in a way that reflects our concern that the conference remain focused on UNRWA's core humanitarian mandate and avoid politicized debate. Israel's apparent readiness to let the conference proceed without its participation, while being kept fully informed of preparations and the conference's findings would preserve everyone's (including Israel's) equities in the conference. This approach enables UNRWA to generate positive publicity for its mandate and give donors a voice in establishing medium-term program priorities for the agency.

GNEHM